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“Tests and rubrics and checklists don't create good teachers” – The Significance of Empowering
Teachers

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Introduction: A Snapshot of What's at the Heart of Current Educational Policy

Recent educational policy provides states with a lot of leeway in their definition of what makes for a highly qualified teacher and determines how to evaluate their teachers. Current national education law, Race to the Top (RTTT), provides the bare minimum idea of what makes for a highly qualified teacher. A troubling side effect of this ambiguity in regards to teacher evaluations, RTTT pushed for the use of a Value Added Model (VAM) that partially ties teachers salaries to their student's test scores. This is unfortunate because conducting teacher evaluations is a complex task, and it seems unreasonable to connect teacher's salaries to the success of their students according to test scores.

This thesis aims to better understand what makes for a highly qualified teacher and to explore the ways in which they are evaluated in conjunction with current national educational policy. It will then take a closer look specifically at Broward County schools in South Florida and how the expectations of teachers to be "highly qualified", as deemed by national policies, actually plays out in schools. How evaluation systems determine whether a teacher meets these standards. There seems to be a fogginess around what is expected of teachers, and with the new ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) of 2015 passed by President Obama, expectations are more nebulous and left up to the states, allowing for room to better understand how a teacher should be evaluated.

This topic is important because a lot of recent national policies focus on teacher quality. Recent national policy pushes schools/districts to determine a teacher's quality and in some cases, base 50% their pay on their student test scores on state exams, but can a test score really inform us of a teacher's worth and skills?

This paper addresses the following questions: How do counties influence teacher evaluations? What do teachers within the system think are essential aspects of a highly effective teacher?

The topics of teacher quality and teacher evaluations for high school teachers interests me because as a student who grew up in the era of the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) of 2002, which began the forced use of high stakes testing, I never experienced a form of education where I was interested in what I was learning, until college. Everything that I learned from third grade through high school was taught strictly with the intention of passing the end of the year state exam. Through this work I will better understand the experiences of teachers who taught under these policies, which will have informed my experiences. Beyond that, I will better understand my own experiences and how national policy impacted my education.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Contemporary Policies: A Nation At Risk to Race to the Top

Federal educational policies since the 1960's have significantly altered the way that people view the profession of teaching and the ways in which teachers are evaluated. A contentious issue within contemporary American education since *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983) brought education-related issues to the forefront, teacher quality seems to never be defined adequately by any entity, nor does a standard definition exist. *A Nation At Risk* was a 36 page report commissioned through United States President Ronald Reagan's' National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 to report on America's educational system. Essentially a polemic used to incite fear into Americans, this reported on the idea that American students were falling behind their peers and competitors in other countries, which was believed by American politicians to be why American industry was becoming less successful than competing industries in other industrial nations.

The report's recommendations include strengthening high school requirements

by taking the following curriculum during their 4 years of high school: (a) 4 years of English; (b) 3 years of mathematics; (c) 3 years of science; (d) 3 years of social studies; and (e) one-half year of computer science. For the college-bound, 2 years of foreign language in high school are strongly recommended in addition to those taken earlier (*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, 32).

This recommendation was followed by recommendations for colleges and universities to strengthen their entry requirements, to lengthen either the average school day or the school year, to improve the preparation of teachers and to make it a more well-respected profession, and that

American citizens hold their elected officials responsible for enacting and creating these changes (*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*).

The report endorses more rigorous requirements for admission to colleges and universities, using standardized test scores and rigid high school course requirements with stronger performances in these courses required. Similarly, *A Nation At Risk* suggests using standardized tests at major transitional points in a student's career. Many of the recommendations made in *A Nation At Risk* are still being discussed today. This demonstrates that America still hasn't fixed its education issues, and this remains a fear, that American students are falling behind their international peers. American students consistently scored below students in other countries when international comparisons were done, which suggests that American students were less prepared for the workforce (17). This also shows that these ideas of increased standardization of curriculum and increased testing are not the most effective solutions to our problems.

A Nation At Risk uses an inflammatory tone to incite fear and grab the reader's attention. Lines in the report such as "...without lifelong learning, one's skills will become rapidly dated" and "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" effectively illustrate the image of a failing American education system that even America's worst enemies wouldn't inflict upon us (*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, 17 and 5, respectively). Similarly, the idea that our system leads to rapidly dated skills creates a sense of urgency for the reader, because it suggests that if we don't act quickly enough, then our

knowledge will become obsolete. However, the language became less inflammatory and more persuasive, informative, and learned when it comes to the recommendations.

Of all of the recommendations, recommendation B stands out the most because there is still currently discussion on issues with academic rigor required for college admissions, especially with increasing college attendance rates, as is the concern about standardized tests. Recommendation D of *A Nation at Risk* (which pushes for higher standards for teachers, higher salaries for teachers, and financial incentives to get more students to become teachers) does seem like an effective solution (*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, 39). Countries such as Canada and Finland pay their teachers more and have made teaching a more respected profession, which seems to have greatly improved their educational systems, such that all teachers in Finland need Master's degrees, and it's the most sought after major amongst students (Sahlberg).

NCLB:

NCLB, a federal law passed under George W. Bush's administration, was a continuation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which provided federal funding to better the education of disadvantaged youth. NCLB aimed to also improve the education of underprivileged youth, and a major component in this goal was to ensure that "highly qualified" teachers taught these youth within about three to four years from the passage of the act. Interestingly, nowhere within the actual act does a definition of a "highly qualified" teacher exist. The government required that "teachers must have full state certification, a bachelor's degree, and demonstrate competence in core academic subjects they teach" at a minimum, but beyond that, each individual state determines what makes a "highly qualified"

teacher (U.S. Congress House Committee on Education, 2004, 2). One should note that it could be tricky to try to measure competence, as evidenced by the debates over the effectiveness of high-stakes testing. This left a lot of the onus of teacher regulation up to the states, and meant that each individual state could enact separate rules to define what makes a “highly qualified” teacher.

NCLB ushered in a stronger federal role in education with the enforcement of states to administer annual reading and math exams to students in third through eighth grade, with the exams in fourth and eighth grade to be given to The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to determine the successfulness of states and essentially create a national educational report card. Once again, the push for accountability of students’ success was to focus on “future success”. President Bush claimed that an increase in testing would be the “cornerstone of success” (Cross, 128). Bush also said that he wanted to address the high rates of illiteracy in America, especially within low-income areas, an admirable goal that was addressed through increased testing (127).

In addition to annual testing and raised standards for teachers, NCLB created Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a measurement that required schools and students to show progress towards improved standards during a 12 year time-span, although states were able to show progress over a span of two or three years. The law allowed for parents to transfer their children to a different public school if their current school didn’t show AYP. NCLB aimed to provide states with more freedom in how to spend their educational federal funding. President Bush hoped that NCLB would close the achievement gap, a theoretical discrepancy between underprivileged groups (low-income, differently-abled, and/or students of color) and their

wealthy, white peers such that wealthy, white students generally perform better in school and on (standardized) exams (Cross). All of this standardized testing for teachers through NCLB set the groundwork for the use of VAM.

RTTT:

Following the NCLB act, the Obama administration enacted RTTT, a competitive grant program that pushed for states to compete against one another in order to raise standardized test scores, and created Common Core Standards for schools to achieve. The idea here was akin to the idea behind capitalism, that forcing states to compete for federal funding would inspire states to find ways to improve their education systems, such that they would be more focused on finding ways to raise the success of their students in order to attain more federal funding for schools.

In order to show that their students were successful, states needed their students to attain high scores on the annual state tests that they took. Thus, RTTT created even more frenzy over test scores and made test scores even more of a priority than NCLB. With this increased focus on high-stakes testing, teachers lost a lot of agency as they began to teach students in ways to prepare them for these yearly tests and to meet the Common Core Standards found in RTTT. The teaching profession became less respectable with NCLB, as the federal government wanted proof of student success through state testing. This lack of respect crystallized with RTTT, and the teaching profession became significantly underappreciated as teachers were essentially handed very specific curriculums that they were expected to teach, instead of providing teachers with the agency to determine the best ways to teach their students and the best materials to use to teach to the best of their abilities (Onosko).

Under RTTT, the US Department of Education provided two assessment groups (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers and SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium) with \$361 million “to design and deliver national assessments aligned to the common national standards...[and] to develop curriculum materials and instructional guides for America’s teachers” (Onosko, 1-2). This shows that the federal government was assigning a significant amount of money to testing agencies instead of to schools themselves, thus prioritizing high-stakes standardized testing over the various ways that states could utilize federal funding for education (such as spending more money per-student or to keep the facilities running effectively and safely). Succinctly put, RTTT “increases standardization, centralization, and test-based-accountability” (1).

Similar to NCLB, RTTT gave states a decent amount of autonomy in how to meet expectations for standardized test scores; however, in terms of teacher quality, RTTT pushes for “highly effective teachers” of which the Department of Education (DOE) states:

means a teacher whose students achieve high rates (e.g., one and one-half grade levels in an academic year) of student growth (as defined in this notice). States, LEAs [local educational agency], or schools must include multiple measures, provided that teacher effectiveness is evaluated, in significant part, by student growth (as defined in this notice). Supplemental measures may include, for example, multiple observation- based assessments of teacher performance or evidence of leadership roles (which may include mentoring or leading professional learning communities) that increase the effectiveness of other teachers in the school or LEA (US DOE, 12).

RTTT claims that teachers deserve the title of “highly effective teacher” either solely based on test scores, or through various other measures combined that still show student growth (likely still in conjunction with student test scores), although this second method seems more vague. School districts need to devote a significant amount of time and energy to determine how they plan to understand and implement RTTT in their county. RTTT allows for the use of VAM, where up to 50% of a teacher’s annual evaluation can be based on their student’s test scores on the annual exams, to be explained in depth below. RTTT took NCLB’s AYP one step further and made it such that “Teachers who fail to improve student test scores at the projected rate for three consecutive years can be fired or transferred [and] Underperforming schools over a three-year period will see their administrators removed” (Onosko, 5). Thus, RTTT made the need to meet AYP more drastic. It required teachers and schools to speed up the process to meet AYP if they weren’t already meeting AYP and feel the pressure to continue to meet AYP, or their jobs were at risk.

The power and control of education has shifted significantly over the last 20 years. States lost significant power to the federal government through NCLB, and then lost even more power to the federal government with RTTT. “In less than twenty years we’ve gone from district-designed curriculum and testing, to state-driven standards and testing under Clinton and Bush, to Obama’s national curriculum materials, and high-stakes national test” (Onosko, 1).

Broward County’s Reaction to These Policies:

In an attempt to compete for funding through standardized curriculums, states interpreted these policies in different ways to best meet the competition of RTTT and attain funding. Florida

uses a form of merit pay in response to RTTT to determine a teacher's quality and how much they should earn. The Florida Senate in 2009 stated

The NCTQ [National Council on Teacher Quality] commended the state for directing local districts to use both subjective and objective measures of student performance, including state assessment data, in their teacher evaluations and for making student performance the preponderant criterion in the teacher evaluation. In addition, Florida was commended for recognizing performance pay and connecting it to student achievement, and for doing it in a manner that allows local districts the flexibility to define criteria by which it is awarded and enabling all teachers to participate, not just those with students who take standardized tests (Florida Legislature Senate, 7).

Similar to how the RTTT executive statement didn't indicate what other forms of evaluations could be used to evaluate teachers other than the test scores of their students, this brief from the Florida Senate doesn't indicate what other measures could be used to determine a teacher's quality in their evaluations, leaving the decision up to individual districts. In order to be deemed a "highly qualified teacher", a person must (Florida DOE):

1. Have a minimum of a bachelor's degree.
 - a. "Not new" teachers of core subjects at any level must meet one of the following requirements:
 - i. Hold a Temporary/Professional Certificate and passed the subject area tests in their field
 - ii. Have a score of 100 on a HOSSE (High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation) for their field

- iii. Or for elementary teachers have a Florida Professional Certificate and have passed a subject exam in their field from another state and for middle/high school teachers have a major or passing score on a subject test for their field.
- b. New elementary school teachers (with no teaching experience) must have a temporary certificate and passed a subject test in their field.
- c. New middle/high school teachers must have a major or a passing score on a subject test in their field.

Broward County, located in South Florida, uses the Marzano method for teacher evaluations. Broward is only one of many school districts in the state that use the Marzano method, as it's used in some capacity in all 50 states, Australia, Canada, and in some countries in Europe, South America and Asia (Marzano, Schooling, Toth, 2010, 8). Robert Marzano has a strong presence in the education market with his book *The Art and Science of Teaching: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction (Professional Development)* where he uses charts, graphs, and statistical data to show how there is a science to teaching, while stating that understanding how to implement this science and with which students is an art. In order to see the impact of his evaluation method, the research performed by the Marzano center expected the teachers and administration to be tested on the Marzano Rubric, Marzano Taxonomy, and The Art and Science of Teaching. Thus, this method expects teachers to have a full understanding of Marzano's framework (not just of his evaluation method), in order for his evaluation method to be effective and provide positive results (Marzano).

The Marzano Method & Its Implementation In Broward County:

Marzano has four domains it focuses on and each domain is worth a certain value. This allows schools to calculate a teacher's success by awarding them points based on the value as described by the Marzano Method. A more detailed chart of the Marzano method can be found in the appendix (figure 1.1).

- The first domain focuses on classroom strategies and behaviors including: “segments involving routine events”, such as tracking and providing rubrics for students, “segments addressing content” such as chunking content together, and “segments enacted on the spot” such as playing devil’s advocate for the students.
- Domain two focuses on planning and preparing which the method breaks up into several groups including: planning for lesson and units, preparing for use of materials and technology, and planning for special needs of students.
- Domain three focuses on self-reflection of teaching and includes the subcategories of: evaluating personal performance, and developing and implementing a professional growth plan.
- Domain four focuses on professionalism and collegiality and is inclusive of: promotion of a positive environment, exchanging ideas and strategies, and promotion of district and school development (Marzano).
- Broward County claimed that in 2012 only the first domain from the Marzano method of evaluation would be used, and that the three remaining domains would be “rolled out at a later time” (*Office of Talent Development*).

Marzano acknowledges that there is an art to teaching. However, the program uses strictly research-based methodologies to explain it. He explains how his model helps schools with the need for improved test scores for federal funding through RTTT, and makes statements such as “The results of those studies strongly correlated the Marzano Causal Teacher Evaluation Model to positive results in raising student state test scores” to attract schools to his method by focusing on the statistical results of standardized test scores in our nation’s current state of school accountability (Marzano).

Broward county specifically implements the Marzano method of evaluation by having 40% of a teacher’s evaluation rely on test scores through the value-added model (VAM), where schools compare students previous test scores to create an expected test score. The school then compares that expected test score to the test score that the student receives at the end of the year, and the difference is the value added. The other 60% of a teacher’s evaluation is based on their instructional practice. This 60% instructional practice bases its evaluations on Marzano’s method of evaluation by using domain one only, while claiming that the other two domains will be used in the future (*Office of Talent Development*).

It will now be beneficial to address contemporary research on what makes for an effective teacher to better understand how Broward County aligns with ideas of what research suggest makes for an effective teacher. The current trend within national and federal policies seems to lean towards accountability in terms of standardized tests to determine a teacher’s quality, and current research suggests that much more determines teacher quality (such as experience and teacher morale).

Certification and Degrees:

Joshua Angrist and Jonathan Guryan (2007) researched whether or not having teachers take exams for certification and licensure improved teacher quality. They discuss how having potential teachers take exams can limit the field since exams can be pricey and not everyone can afford to take these exams, which can prevent people from becoming teachers who schools would otherwise hire. They discuss the fact that the widely used Praxis II exams have an extremely high pass rate (87% on the general Praxis II exam) and speculate that this could be a result of “weak effects of state test requirements on the quality distribution” (498).

Charles Clotfelter, Helen Ladd, and Jacob Vigdor (2007) studied whether teacher credentials affect student achievement through test scores. They find that teacher experience and licensure have positive effects on student achievement, with a more positive effect on student’s math scores than reading scores. Teachers with emergency or temporary licensure seem to have negative impacts on student achievement. Teachers who are board certified (through the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards) significantly raise student achievement.

Linda Darling-Hammond and Gary Sykes (2003) found that teacher certification and licensure do positively impact student achievement based on a few studies on the topic. In addition to teacher knowledge and experience, “enthusiasm, flexibility, perseverance, concern for children—and many specific teaching practices make a difference for learning” (8). This suggests that a copious amount of attributes and skills contribute to a successful teacher, which can make it difficult to know exactly how best to evaluate teachers.

Thomas Kane, Jonah Rockoff, and Douglas Staiger (2007) performed a study in New York City on how certification affects teacher quality. They claim that traditionally certified

teachers may be more prepared to learn and improve their teaching skills than alternative certified teachers (like those of Teach for America or New York City Teaching Fellows) due to their training. This study finds little difference in the effectiveness of uncertified and alternatively certified teachers and suggests that NCLB's approach to teacher quality may be a poor decision.

Charles Clotfelter, Helen Ladd, and Jacob Vigdor (2007) also found that teachers who obtained a master's degree prior to teaching or in their first five years of teaching weren't less or more effective teachers. Yet, those who earn their master's degree after five years of teaching have negative effects on student achievement. Interestingly, the authors don't have any suggestions as to why this may be the case. They suggest altering the distribution of teachers in ways to ensure that already disadvantaged students don't have teachers with weaker credentials.

Teaching Experience:

A slightly less debated topic, most of the literature reviewed here agrees that experience does improve teacher quality, although to what extent isn't clear. Douglas Harris and Tim Sass (2010) conducted a study on the effects of teacher training on teacher quality. They state that while many studies suggest that teacher quality improves with the first five years of on-the-job training and then abruptly stops, they found that teacher quality improves the most in the first five years from on-the-job training, but that teachers still continue to improve beyond their first five years (just less significantly). However, they also found that professional development doesn't significantly or consistently improve teacher quality, even after ten years of teaching. With this information, they suggest that it's more beneficial to retain teachers than to constantly hire new teachers who may be more qualified than the last. Thus, it is essential for schools to

retain teachers and avoid having high turnover rates. As Linda Darling-Hammond and Gary Sykes (2003) note, it would be more constructive to retain teachers already within the system than to train new ones, as their experience makes them qualified teachers. Specific fields (such as special needs or STEM subjects) do experience a lack of qualified applicants, and so it's even more essential to ensure that schools can retain these teachers by keeping morale up for teachers of these subjects.

Thomas Kane, Jonah Rockoff, and Douglas Staiger's (2008) biggest argument is that "raising the effectiveness of novice teachers in New York by one standard deviation would have a similar impact on student achievement as the expected improvement of novices who spend 8 years teaching in the district" (629). This suggests that districts should use performance on the job to improve teacher quality, rather than relying on certification to improve teacher quality or as an indicator of teacher quality for hiring new teachers. Raising the stakes for value-added models of student assessments for teacher evaluations could narrow the curriculum and lead teachers to lie about student tests scores, so a better system of evaluating teachers would be beneficial. For instance, at Crofoot Elementary School in 2005 in Pontiac, Michigan

cheating on both the math and English-language tests was confirmed...by interviews with faculty members and by an analysis of erasures on test papers. On the English test, the erasure analysis showed 80% of the fourth-graders' answers with erasures were changed from wrong to right; the average for the school was 35% (Amos, Ryman, and Upton).

The average for the English was originally thought to be 89%, and thus teachers cheated for the students and increased the average school score in English by 54% (Amos, Ryman, and Upton).

Professional Development and Teacher Distribution:

Douglas Harris and Tim Sass (2010) claim that professional development takes teachers away from their students (as it generally occurs during school hours), and thus students lose this time where they would be learning from their teachers. They also claim that it's difficult to know if a teacher truly implements things learned during professional development. As most professional development occurs during the school year, teachers may not have the time or space within their lessons plans to implement any major changes and may wait until the following school year to enact any changes.

Linda Darling-Hammond and Gary Sykes (2003) claim that America suffers from a poor distribution of high-quality teachers, not a shortage of qualified applicants. NCLB recognized this fact as well. Students with the most disadvantages tend to also be taught by the most poorly equipped teachers. Schools with the most disadvantaged students also have the most trouble retaining quality teachers, either because the job is too difficult for new teachers or because qualified teachers can receive better pay at a better functioning school that likely has better funding. Even though NCLB recognized this fact, it didn't aim to distribute teachers more fairly to students, but attempted to ensure that all teachers were qualified by having them meet AYP.

Race and Gender:

Michael Strong (2011) discusses a study by Thomas Dee (2004) that has a racially matched teacher to the students which significantly improved student performance and behavior for low-income, students of color from the South who seem to suffer the most from being viewed negatively by their teachers, which leads to lower test scores. Dee suggests professional development for all teachers to overcome negative expectations, as it may be difficult to match

every student with a similarly raced teacher. Strong also references another study by Dee (2005) which shows that both Black and White students perform better in Math and Reading when taught by teachers of the same race. Strong states that this is evidence of the Pygmalion effect, which claims that people perform better with they experience greater expectations, in this case by teachers who express high expectations for students of the same race.

The importance of culturally relevant pedagogies for low-income students and students of color was highlighted by Tyrone Howard (2003). American education, as it has functioned since it's creation, has valued wealthy, white European forms of knowledge to the detriment of students of color and low-income students, which generally leads to their trouble succeeding in school. In order to change this for the better and to undermine racism within a country where populations of people of color are constantly growing, it's essential for teachers to self-reflect on their views, experiences, and teaching methods in order to better create pedagogies that values all students from all backgrounds.

Similarly, Strong references a study by Ronald Ehrenberg (1994) that showed no significant improvement for students paired with teachers of the same race or gender. However, a study by Lucia Nixon and Michael Robinson (1999) shows a small positive effect for females with female teachers as a source of a role model. These studies suggest that having teachers who believe that all of their students can improve and be successful learners would improve their educational experience. Teachers who inherently assume that certain students will perform badly or be unsuccessful students because of their race or gender harms students and their self-confidence.

International Comparison:

One of the people that I survey for this thesis references Pasi Sahlberg (2011), a Finnish educator and scholar who explains that Finland made standardized exams practically a non-existent thing in their education system and allowed for teachers, administrators, and communities to delegate what should be covered in school curricula and how. Teachers have significant autonomy in what and how they teach. Teaching is a prestigious profession now in Finland and teaching is the hardest job to get and a more sought after major by college students, more so than for students who want to become doctors or lawyers. Finnish students have significantly less homework and class time than most industrialized nations (teachers teach 800 hours annually in Finland, and 1,080 hours annually in America). All Finnish teachers are required to have at minimum a Master's degree. Their higher education is free. Sahlberg claims that the research oriented master's teacher education programs prepares teachers to work in "complex, changing societal and educational environments" (94). Sadly, with teacher evaluations that include VAM which prioritizes student test scores over teacher creativity and agency, the United States doesn't value teachers in the same way that Finland does, nor does it have the same expectations of teachers.

Value-Added Model:

The value-added model (VAM) uses student tests scores from a given year in comparison to the previous year, and also compares student test scores across students as a form of teacher evaluation. Michael Strong (2011) discusses how the value added model fails to account for a student's background (such as race or socioeconomic standing). He also discusses how it assumes that teacher effects will remain stable over time, a lack of attention to the possibility of

teacher success with certain types of students (such as a connection between race or gender of a teacher and their students of the same race or gender), and worry with the doubt of school effects with teacher effects.

Conclusion:

The federal government has set minimum standards for teacher quality, but left most of the decisions on what makes for a “highly qualified teacher” up to each individual state. Florida specifically hasn’t added many additional requirements to the national government’s minimal standards, and uses a form of accountability to determine a teacher’s success, based on students achievement on the state's standardized tests for a value added model, along with the Marzano method. Studies seem to provide conflicting data on how teacher certification impacts a teacher’s quality, yet most research seems to agree that on-the-job experience improves teacher quality. However, the one thing that none of these aforementioned examples do is provide teachers voices in explaining when they feel that they became effective teachers, regarding how soon they began to feel “highly qualified”, what factors (such as certification or professional development) impacted this, and what advice they would give to make new teachers more effective for their students in the classroom sooner rather than later. Similarly, none of the above literature addresses the ways in which teachers feel they would best be evaluated (in conjunction with or in opposition to VAM).

There’s a significant shift in power that’s occurring with the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015). President Obama has transferred educational power back to the states. ESSA is a reauthorization and renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education

Act of 1965 (ESEA), which, passed under President Johnson and provided more funding to schools with a larger portion of low-income children as part of Johnson's war on poverty.

The bill provides states with increased flexibility and responsibility for developing accountability systems, deciding how federally required tests should be weighed, selecting additional measures of student and school performance, and implementing teacher evaluation systems (S.1177, 114th Cong).

ESSA provides grants to improve poorly performing schools and requires that homeless youth have access to services provided by the state and by schools (S.1177, 114th Cong). This will remove the pressure of high-stakes testing, and will hopefully provide teachers with increased agency that NCLB and RTTT removed from them. Unfortunately, ESSA was passed so recently that it's not yet possible to see how states will change their education systems in reaction to these new freedoms, and thus the purview of my research in Broward County isn't affected by this new law. However, with this transition of power back to the states, this is a great time to listen to the voices of teachers. The research that I undertake here privileges teacher voices to understand how best to support teachers, to understand what they feel is important for a person to be a qualified teacher, and how we might best evaluate teachers.

Chapter Two: Methodology

In order to address my central questions of: How do counties influence teacher evaluations? What do teachers within the system think are essential aspects of a highly effective teacher?, it seems sensible to turn to teachers themselves to have them self-reflexively look at their own work and experiences within the teaching profession. They can provide an insider's view on what they think makes for a qualified teacher and more effective ways of evaluating teachers. Unfortunately, the teaching profession tends to be underappreciated in America, which often leads to teacher's voices being undervalued in some research.

I intend to focus on the voices of teachers in my research, to incorporate their opinions of what makes for a qualified teacher in the surplus of existing research. It's important to understand and value the opinions and experiences of teachers because as research shows, teacher experience improves the success of a teacher. Therefore, when people who have never taught make federal policies, and they chose not to incorporate teacher's voices, then the decisions made will lack any valuable knowledge about what to expect from a teacher. To incorporate teacher's voices into my work, I will use a qualitative approach so that I can tease through teacher's experiences with being evaluated and analyze their thoughts on what makes for a qualified teacher.

In order to position my research within the already existing research on what makes for a qualified teacher, my method first consisted of looking at national policies, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT), to understand how the federal government defines a qualified teacher and how these policies affect how Florida evaluates teachers, as the federal government used these policies to take control of education. I then reviewed the relevant

literature regarding teacher quality, all of which conducted studies that used student test scores to determine whether or not specific aspects of a teacher's qualifications (certification, level of degree, teaching experience, and pedagogical content knowledge) or personal attributes (race, gender, beliefs) make for a qualified teacher.

For my own research, I've put together a short survey and utilized qualitative inquiry from the surveys as the groundwork for my research. As George Kamberelis and Greg Dimitriadis (2005) state of qualitative research and methodologies

They include the use of nonquantifiable [sic] data; they are highly contextualized and provide richly textured accounts of complex social phenomena; they deploy narrative rhetorical techniques to make their arguments; and they are more interested in verisimilitude, trustworthiness, and praxis than validity and generalizability (23).

My survey is an anonymous survey filled out by high school teachers in the Broward County school district. Three teachers who work at different schools offered to pass the electronic survey along to their coworkers. I chose to focus on Broward County teachers to better understand my own experience from high school, and because it's where I have the most connection to teachers who would be willing to help pass along my survey. With this research, I gained a stronger sense of my own experience as a student, especially in regards to the state testing, with the FCAT (Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test), and my experiences in conjunction with teacher experiences. For instance, one teacher stated in response to my survey that, "You teach for the observation when an administrator comes in", which is something that students, including myself, picked up on. I remember talking to friends after class about how a

teacher suddenly taught differently one day because he or she was being watched by the administration.

Demographics:

Broward County has a population of 1,869,235 with 21.5% of these people being under 18. The population is approximately 64.9% white, 28.9% black, 27.5% Latino, and 39.8% “White alone, not Hispanic or Latino”. More specific to schools, 39.69% of students are black, 29.71% of students are Latino, 24.09% of students are white, and 3.64% are Asian/Pacific Islander. 37.8% of residents speak a language other than English at home. Broward County has 15,213 teachers and 262,666 students. 60% of these students are on free and/or reduced lunch. Students attend school for 180 in a school year and teachers have 13 additional teacher workdays. The average starting salary for a teacher is \$40,000, while the maximum pay a teacher can receive is \$79,250. Teachers are evaluated once a year (*US Census Bureau*).

Demographics of respondents:

Of the 13 teachers who responded to my survey, 3 of the respondents identify as male, and the remaining ten as women; two currently work at a charter school, while the remaining 11 at a public school, five of these teachers began teaching at a charter school, while the remaining eight began teaching at a public school; only three teachers have taught for less than 9 years, four teacher’s highest degrees are bachelor’s degrees, while the remaining nine have attained a master’s degree, all but one teacher are certified, and all teach core subjects (English/reading, math, or science), except for one teacher who teaches special education.

Survey:

Firstly, the survey consists of eleven background questions, inclusive of: What is your gender? How many years have you been teaching? At what type of school did you begin teaching? How many years did you work at this school for? What type of school do you currently teach at? How long have you been working at your current school? What subject do you teach? Are you teaching in the subject area that you chose to pursue? Are you a certified teacher? What is the highest level of school that you have completed or the highest degree you have received? and Is your degree(s) (Associate, Bachelor, etc.) in the subject that you teach? These background questions can provide basic insight into each individual teacher's experiences while still remaining anonymous. For instance, how more experienced teachers answer the second set of questions for this survey may differ greatly than less experienced teachers, and these questions allow me to look for such differences.

The central questions from my survey are as follows:

1. How would you define a "qualified teacher"?
2. Penelope is a new teacher. She just graduated from college, earned her teacher certificate, and is about to start her first year of teaching. What advice would you give to her to prepare her for her first year?
3. How does your school/your county currently evaluate you as a teacher?
4. Do you feel the way that your school/county evaluates you is effective? Why/why not?
5. If you had an opportunity to develop a teacher evaluation system, what would you want to specifically look at and how would you go about evaluating teachers on these expectations?

Data Analysis:

With qualitative research, a limited number of people can be surveyed to properly examine their responses in depth. I have received 13 anonymous responses to my survey. While this is a smaller batch of responses than I had hoped for, I have enough information to compare and contrast the responses, and delve deeper into what each individual said in response to my questions. This compare and contrast will allow for me to see if teachers feel similarly about what makes for a highly qualified teacher, how they feel about their teacher evaluations, and what should be focused on in teacher evaluations, and then work through the differences to see if their current evaluation systems impacted their opinions. Thus, I take each individual response to my survey, understand the stated opinions, and position it against and amongst the other responses. I had to keep my survey relatively brief, in hopes that teachers will take the time out of their days to fill it out, which can limit the information that I can obtain from this method of research.

Similarly, by having high schools teachers within a specific county fill out a survey anonymously, I can't guarantee a diverse sample (in terms of gender, race, age, or experience) that would represent a similar sample in another state or school district or the United States more broadly. Nor can this information act as a comprehensive understanding of teacher's experiences and opinions. This information alone could not provide an appropriate response to altering teacher evaluation systems nationally and how we view highly qualified teachers outside of Broward County. That being said, this sample will still provide a valuable insight into teacher opinions on what makes for a highly qualified teacher and their experiences in being evaluated,

that in conjunction with research from other counties, could provide a larger perspective on how to help create and hire qualified teachers and how to best evaluate teachers.

With this survey, I accomplish what Kamberelis and Dimitriadis state that qualitative inquiry aims to do; to

Refine and deepen our sense of what it means to understand other people and their social practices...within relevant contexts of interaction and communication...[to discover] knowledge with a genuine interest in understanding and enriching the “life worlds” (33).

I incorporated the responses to my survey to improve my understanding of how Broward County teachers experience evaluations, what they believe to be the best way to evaluate teachers, and to understand their insights into what makes for a highly qualified teacher within the context of their experiences and the aforementioned federal policies.

Chapter Three: Teacher Quality and Evaluations According to Teachers

In order to analyze the survey responses, I coded the thirteen responses and compared how many teachers responded similarly to each question and how many responded with a significantly different answer. I delved deeper into each response and connected it to their answers to other questions to see if their responses seem to be impacted by their experiences and to previous research. I refer to each respondent by their order of their response to my survey, numbers one through thirteen, such that the first respondent will be labeled respondent one.

Teachers Views of Current Evaluation Systems and Its Flaws:

Overwhelmingly, teachers expressed dismay with their current evaluation systems. Ten out of thirteen respondents reported that they felt as though their current way of being evaluated was ineffective. The first respondent noted that she isn't aware of a more efficient way of evaluating teachers, even though she feels that the current system isn't effective. The teachers who claim that their school uses poor tools to evaluate them mention various tools such as the Marzano method, formal observations, and value added models.

Nearly 77% of respondents feel that they are insufficiently evaluated. In certain situations, those who would respond to a survey have strong opinions on the subject, whether they be extremely positive or negative, such that people who review services and goods (i.e. a restaurant or a movie) only bother to review said items when they feel the need to share their experiences because they were either exceptionally good or bad. With this in mind, only 23% of respondents felt that their school properly evaluates them.

The three teachers that felt that they are effectively evaluated by their schools/district seem to have differing reasons as to why. For instance, teacher number ten stated that her school

uses an effective system to evaluate her experiences. The method she described are formal observations, value added model, and an absurdly long report that she must fill out (which she didn't expand upon) as the method of evaluation. With that being said, she also stated that she feels that she experiences too much paperwork when it comes to being evaluated and that the testing, while important and helpful, is too high stakes for students. She stated that it's too much pressure for them and limits the teacher's agency over their curriculum, thus influencing their education in a negative way. This would suggest that while she states that her school/district effectively evaluates her, she would still make changes to improve the system, such that the system has inefficiencies in certain areas.

Respondent number seven claimed that she enjoys the self-assessment aspect of her evaluations since it significantly differs from the value added model that relies on student performances. She was the only respondent to say she has a self-assessment portion in her evaluation system. Evidently, the power that her school affords her by determining her own quality through a self-assessment gives her some agency and works in accordance with the other aspects of her evaluation system (formal observations and administration walkthroughs) to create an accumulated look into her work as a teacher. The only way that this teacher would improve the evaluation system would be to add a student questionnaire, which would essentially mean that administrators, the teacher themselves, and students would all play a part in evaluating each teacher. This holistic view of a teacher's work would allow for comparisons from different viewpoints to determine what issues or successes overlap between the three evaluators, and any trend could be noted and further evaluated.

Lastly, respondent number eleven feels that her school/district evaluates her effectively with the Marzano method. Her stated reasoning for why it's an effective tool is that her county has been using this model for years. I would argue, however, that sheer time of using a specific method doesn't make it an effective one. Similarly to respondent number ten, she stated that if she were to create her own evaluation method that she would have a focus on how teachers connect with students as a way to evaluate their social and emotional skills to create student-teacher relationships, which seems to be absent from the Marzano method of evaluation. Once again, this suggests that while she feels that her school/district effectively evaluates her, she does feel that the system has inefficiencies or lacks in certain areas. Other respondents, however, have a different view of the Marzano method.

Marzano Method:

Respondents three and eleven both reference the use of Marzano methods of evaluation in their current systems of evaluation. Respondents three and six both claimed that their current way of being evaluated are ineffective. Respondent six, who has been teacher for over twenty-one years and said that she, would prefer to go back to the system that was previously used.

Both respondents three and six argue that their way of being evaluated isn't effective due to the problematic nature of administration observations. Respondent three claims that teachers teach to meet the observer's needs when they come in, which I experienced many times as a student. Suddenly a teacher would be observed and their entire teaching method would change just for one class period, falsifying the observation. Respondent six claims that an observer simply cannot fully experience what a teacher accomplishes, or doesn't, within a single class

period. The Marzano method strictly outlines what's expected of teachers, and so teachers have the opportunity to meet these requirements when they are observed, but not at other times.

The Marzano method seems to be a complicated one, which may be why Broward County only uses a fraction of its approach. As common as the Marzano approach claims to be, studies on the effectiveness of his methods don't seem to exist, outside of research that he himself has done. Such research could be a powerful tool to better understand the current issues within Broward County's evaluation system and help to create a direction for positive change within the system to improve. Broward County uses the Marzano method in conjunction with merit pay, a system that seems to create less incentive than it intends to and more so leads to tension amongst teachers.

Merit Pay:

Merit pay intends to incentivize doing a good job in order to earn better pay, however, as respondent eight points out, she has "taught students with health problems, frequent absences, terminally ill parents or siblings, extreme poverty, homelessness, not-yet-diagnosed learning differences, recent immigrants to the US, and more." Thus, expecting every student to succeed with the same standard seems unreasonable for teachers, and as respondent twelve states, relying on the performance of students for teacher success is unfair to students as well as it is just another added pressure for them to succeed.

Six of the thirteen teachers surveyed work at a charter school in Broward County. It is important to note that charter schools don't always have the same rules to follow from the district as public schools. Notably, the charter school in Broward County that I passed my survey along to doesn't use merit pay the way the rest of the county does. Susan (a pseudonym) informed me

that this charter school has a system where all the teachers earn a bonus if the school receives a grade of an A. Teachers have a 70 page survey to fill out from corporate and are reviewed by administration. Although the school claims to tie student achievement to teacher evaluations, it seems that this isn't explicit and doesn't seem to be true.

With nine out of thirteen teachers from my survey expressing that the way they are evaluated is ineffective, it can easily be seen how merit pay for these teachers may be a problematic system to rely on. One of the four teachers, teacher number seven, who feels that there school effectively evaluates them states,

Considering that some teachers in other parts of the U.S. are assessed based on students' performance, I like the fact that our assessment does not give the impression that we are being judged or criticized but is more of a self assessment, administration input that encourages self improvement.

This indicates that she feels her school effectively evaluates her because of the fact that they don't use student test scores to evaluate her. Although she works at a public school in Broward County, her school seems to use a different form of evaluation. If she were to be evaluated similarly to a value added model based off of student test scores, it seems that she would potentially raise the number of teachers in my survey dissatisfied with their evaluations from nine to ten out of thirteen.

Merit pay becomes a complicated system when it involves evaluating teachers who do not teach subjects that have standardized tests, such as art-related classes (drama, drawing, choir, and the like). For instance, an art teacher in Broward County received an evaluation of effective, even though she had won Art Teacher of the Year for Broward County.

For teachers in untested subjects, their rating is based on how well the school performs overall, rather than their individual performances. None of the teachers who responded to my survey teach any untested subjects, but their views would have been an interesting contrast to the teachers who do teach subjects that are tested (Travis).

With that being said, it's clearly unfair to base a teacher's pay off of the overall performance of their school. This will only create more disparities between higher performing schools and lower performing school as teachers of untested subjects will prefer to work at higher rated schools where they will receive better pay and better evaluations. Similarly, this removes any form of extrinsic motivation for these teachers as their pay and evaluations is completely out of their hands.

Amongst the respondents, three themes emerged as central to what makes for a highly qualified teacher and the traits that should be expected of them in their evaluations: flexibility, teacher agency and trust for teachers as professionals, and student-teacher rapport. The idea of student evaluations also came up as a theme amongst numerous respondents.

Important Themes Found Across Responses:

Flexibility:

Teachers two, four, and twelve would, to some extent, advise a new teacher to be open to learning, be flexible, and accept that you cannot expect every student to excel at the same exact level. This is seemingly is at odds with the value added model and recent legislation, such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, which expect students to all perform at a similarly high level and consistently improve on state tests, regardless of economic or social factors that may impact a student's ability to learn and perform well in a class or on an exam. Such factors would

include lacking the financial stability to have required school supplies or systemic racism that prevents curriculum from being culturally relevant to certain students (such as black, Latino, female, differently abled, or queer students). Therefore, in order to allow teachers to be more flexible and understanding of student's differences in skills and abilities to learn, the relevant federal and state policies, as well as how teachers are evaluated, should better reflect this. Instead it expects students to all succeed with the same test scores, and then bases a teacher's evaluations on this success. Teacher four claimed that qualified teachers "allow for flexibility. Many times you may need to reteach a lesson or something may happen (fire drill, assembly, etc.) that may throw off your plans". He lists aspects of unpredictability in a teacher's work that come directly from the school itself, aspects that a teacher can't always account for but should be able to work around. A qualified teacher should be flexible within their lesson plans so that they can teach the students what needs be taught, even amongst unexpected events.

On a more student focused rather than school focused basis, respondents eleven and thirteen both suggest that a new teacher should be open to learning from students and not expect to be all knowing in the classroom. This specifically epitomizes the difficulty in evaluating a teacher, as it would be difficult to check whether or not a teacher approaches students and the classroom with this mindset. While a formal observation may be able to determine whether or not a teacher successfully teaches content, and is also open to learning from students, it would be highly circumstantial in a way that an observer may not be in the classroom at a moment when a teacher has an opportunity to learn from a student. However, a self-evaluation or student evaluations may be able to ask questions of teachers and students that would indicate if a teacher follows this approach.

Respondent thirteen stated “Never assume you know more than your students do, but make sure you're prepared to. Remember that your students' needs should be your priority.” She made the claim that a qualified teacher should put the students’ needs above all else, and teachers need the flexibility in their curricula and pedagogy to meet these needs. Teachers should be flexible with curriculum in a way that if students have knowledge and/or interest in a related topic to what is being taught, then a teacher should be able to nurture this knowledge and interest by adjusting the curriculum, even if it’s just for individual students (through assigning additional assignments or making individual assignments flexible to match student interest). Expecting every student to succeed with the same standard seems unreasonable for teachers. Teachers need the ability to have a flexible curriculum that can best suit their students who come into the classroom with different needs, backgrounds, experiences, and different interests.

Teacher Agency and Trust for Teachers as Professionals:

Teachers should have the agency within their work to be flexible. In Broward County, a county with such a large Black and Latino population, many students come to school with different cultural capital (which are non-fiscal social resources that bolster social mobility in lieu of economic assets). These students may have recently immigrated from Haiti or a Spanish-speaking country, and they shouldn’t have the same exact curriculum as their native English-speaking peers. “Teachers must be careful to not allow racial classifications of students to be used as rigid and reductive cultural characteristics” and the best way to combat this would be to tailor curricula towards the knowledge that students from backgrounds other than wealthy, white backgrounds bring into classrooms (Howard, 201). Teachers should have the agency to have a flexible curriculum that values these student’s different forms of knowledge and acknowledge

that the needs of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners have different and specific needs that a generalized curriculum cannot meet.

Furthermore, respondent six stated, “Personalization of academic and socio-emotional learning of students is something that is not necessarily taught in school, but is important in this day and age. Thus, having the ability to personalize the educational experience for students will garner much success in this field.” Unfortunately, with RTTT and its stricter use of standardized tests that also standardized curricula with the common core and these standardized exams, teachers lost means to personalize their curricula to their students. It’s important to provide teachers with the freedom to do what’s best for their students, and as teacher six points out, this is vital in contemporary teaching as America’s population continues to become more diverse, which means that curricula needs to become more flexible under individual teacher’s guidance based on their students to meet the needs of students who come into the classroom with various forms and types of knowledge. For instance, as America’s Latino population continues to grow, it’s important to provide students with curricula that also values knowledge relevant to the Latino population, such as books written by Latino authors or books with Latino protagonists in English/reading classes so that Latino students can feel that they connect to the material. The same idea should be applied across the board for classes with students of color or differently abled students.

Providing teachers with agency can be a better way of preparing them to learn on the job, as they must adjust their skill set and lesson plans to accommodate students, and have the freedom to do so. On the other hand, when teachers teach to tests, they have less room to meet student’s needs and must continue to follow prescribed curricula. Teacher one responded with

similar insights, as she claimed, “Everyone knows who is an effective teacher. Everyone knows that tests and rubrics and checklists don't create good teachers, just as the same measures do not define students.” Teachers need the agency to make mistakes and learn from these mistakes to better their skills in the future.

In response to how to evaluate teachers, respondent number eight stated “This quote from Paul Sahlberg, a Finnish educator and scholar, says it all: "How do we evaluate our teachers? We never speak of this. It is irrelevant in our country. Instead, we discuss: 'How can we help them?'"” She quoted Paul Sahlberg to indicate that it’s fruitless to evaluate teachers. We would improve the educational system not by evaluating teachers to remove the seemingly less-than-adequate teachers, but by working to improve and help the teachers that we do have so that they feel more supported. As much of the literature discussed earlier states, a teacher tends to improve in the first three years. Therefore, by offering help to new teachers and working with them to improve, teacher morale would likely improve, and teachers would be more likely to stay. Quickly firing teachers who do not meet expectations with state test scores through the value added model is counterproductive as high teacher turnover leads to a constant flow of teachers who are new to the school who have to adjust to the new school with a new set of students, or leads to hiring new teachers without experience. To change this would involve reinstating teacher agency and removing the power of the federal government to make requirements to dictate how a teacher should teach and creating a sense of community amongst teachers.

Teacher number six gave a similar response as the previous respondent in that she suggested that it would be best to

evaluate teacher effectiveness the way it was done in the beginning; I would trust that educators are intrinsically motivated to educate students because the results are reciprocal. When we impart knowledge to those who seek it, they become upstanding citizens in society. The evidence would be a better world

It should not be surprising that this teacher, based on her response, has been teaching for over twenty-one years. She suggests that evaluations should be less of a top-down approach where administrators determine a teacher's worth and abilities, and more of a personal self-evaluation by the teacher themselves and presumably by their responses from students and their experiences.

A self-evaluation, without a guide from the Marzano method or other methods of how to self-evaluate, would provide a teacher the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and skills and best determine what they need to improve without being told or influenced on how best to self-evaluate. This would be a form of teacher agency within evaluations. Equivalently, trusting teachers to adequately do their job and to seek help when they need it would harken back to the education system prior to NCLB and RTTT. It would provide teachers with a sense of respect to successfully do their job and be an opportunity for the federal government to return some of the control locally, which seems to be a benefit of ESSA, but only time will tell.

Student Evaluations and Student-Teacher Rapports:

Nine out of the thirteen teachers mentioned the importance of students in determining their effectiveness, varying from the power of student feedback to the significance of respecting students. Teachers two and eleven both stated that students know whether or not they have an effective teacher (teacher eleven claiming that students know within a matter of

minutes). Teacher three would incorporate student feedback, teacher seven would include a student questionnaire, and teacher twelve would have student interviews as part of teacher evaluations. Of course, with student evaluations, the age of the students would need to be considered. While colleges/universities tend to use student evaluations, students younger than high school age might be too young to properly evaluate their teachers if they don't fully understand the questions. It could be beneficial to have students substantiate their evaluations with examples of their experiences instead of just using a numbered scale to assign teachers value by points to validate their evaluations.

Considering how many teachers commented on the importance of teacher rapport with students, allowing students to play a role in evaluating teachers could better incentivize building relationships with students to receive stronger evaluations. Respondent eleven states that if she were to create her own evaluation method that she would have a focus on how teachers connect with students as a way to evaluate their social and emotional skills to create student-teacher relationships. Teachers four, five, nine, ten, eleven, and twelve stated that a highly qualified teacher cares for students and knows how to build a good relationship with their students.

Once again, as NCLB and RTTT have taken away teacher agency to be flexible, it naturally becomes harder for teachers to connect with students. While teachers teach to the state exams and essentially teach what the federal government tells them to, teachers lose the ability to find what interests their students and nurture that interest, a key way for teachers to connect with students. Akin to this, it's difficult for teachers to make students feel like they and their knowledge are respected when teachers lack the ability to alter the curricula to teach in ways that values them. Socio-economic status and the race of students matter significantly within

education, as “traditional teaching practices reflect middle-class, European American cultural values” (Howard, 198). As the class divide in the United States between the wealthy and the poor becomes more and more significant (such that the wealthy become wealthier and the poor become poorer) and as minority populations continue to grow, it’s vital that teachers have the agency and flexibility to change the knowledge that schools and teachers value to meet these changes.

ESSA will hand power back to the states and this will allow for individual states to best determine on a smaller scale than the national government what is best for their students. If states through ESSA revive teacher agency, then teachers will have the freedom to create curricula that leaves room to discover more about their students, which then gives way to strengthen relationships with their students and to connect with them on a personal and intellectual level. It will be interesting to see how Florida takes advantage of this return of control and how much power will be delegated individual counties, as even with RTTT Broward County managed to find some form of power in determining how strictly to evaluate teachers in comparison to neighboring counties.

Chapter 4: Discussion

As states will again have power through ESSA, it's essential to see what power Florida allotted local counties under RTTT. This provides insights into what Florida may do with their regained power, and how Broward County may work within this power dynamic based off of their history of teacher evaluations.

Context Matters:

Only 5% of Broward County teachers were rated “highly effective” in 2014, while the two neighboring counties (Palm Beach and Miami-Dade) had 44% and 39% of teachers rated “highly effective” respectively. Broward County’s superintendent argues that this seems a more reasonable percentage statistically, as it better suits the bell curve in which fewer teachers would be “highly effective” or poorly effective, while the majority of teachers would simply be effective (Travis). The bell curve has mostly been applied to IQ results of people, not to the effectiveness of trained individuals, such as teachers. Considering that only 5% of Broward County teachers received a “highly effective” rating in 2014, it’s not hard to understand why nine of thirteen of the teachers surveyed felt that they aren’t properly or adequately evaluated by their school or district.

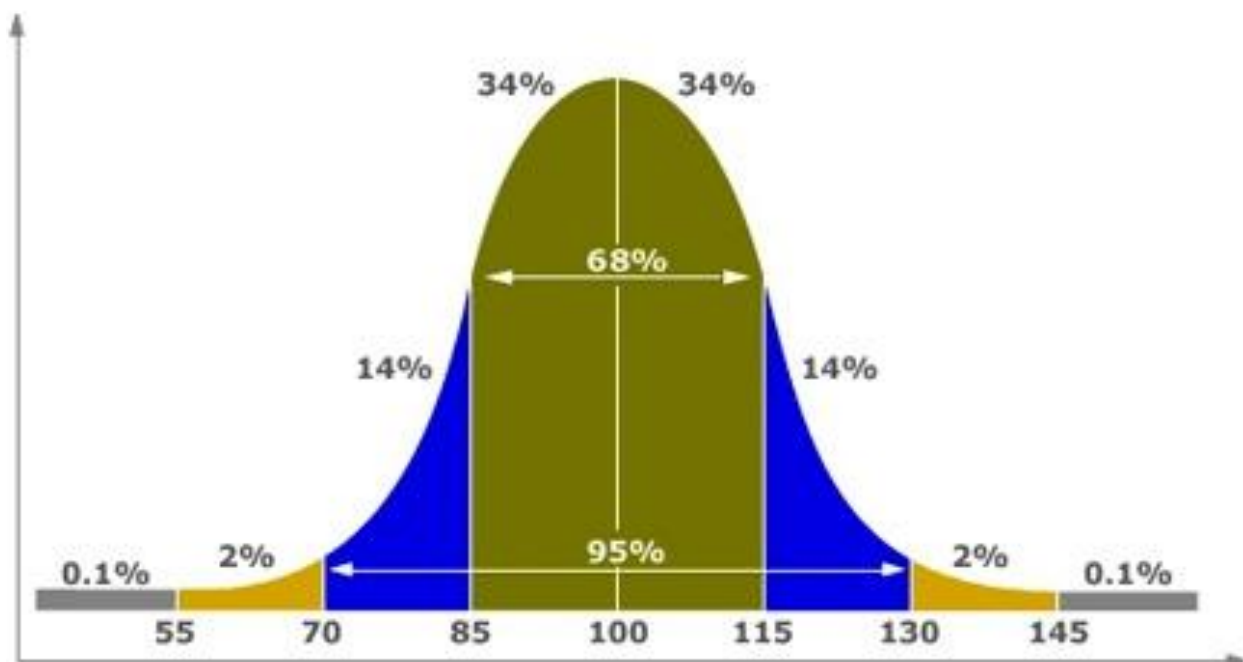


Figure 1.2 Standard bell curve which depicts that 68% of people generally fall within an “average” in a given study (generally IQ testing), while the remaining 32% is split between the higher end and the lower end (*Hand In Hand Education*).

One must consider Broward County’s use of merit pay, where teachers who receive the “highly effective” rating get the largest raises. In a profession that constantly hears discourse about its employees being underpaid, having a merit pay system where only 5% of teachers receive a “highly effective” rating that comes with raises can lead to teachers struggling financially and deter new teachers from wanting to join the profession when they feel like they can’t live solvently (and pay off the inevitable debt incurred from college and teacher training programs).

The superintendent of Broward County claims that

in any large work population, about 10 to 15 percent will be outstanding, 10 to 15 percent need improvement and everyone else falls in between...When you see a district with 40 or

50 percent highly effective, that defies the laws of statistics...We could lower the bar to make everyone feel good. But we're trying to help people develop.

He is directly addressing neighboring Palm Beach and Miami-Dade County, which had 44% and 39% of teachers rated "highly effective" respectively. However, upon further research, Broward County schools did noticeably worse than both Palm Beach and Miami-Dade schools in terms of school grades in 2014. Thus, his intentions seem to be fruitless and solely harming teachers as they lose pay for being more harshly critiqued than teachers in neighboring counties.

School Grade	Broward	West Palm	Miami
A	33.90%	42.8%	43.56%
B	17.20%	14.67%	17.18%
C	30.00%	25.29%	25.15%
D	9.00%	11.80%	9.20%
F	9.60%	5.75%	4.9%

Figure 1.3: 2014 School grades according to Ledger Data

As the previous figure makes evident, Broward had the lowest percentage of schools receive an A of the three districts (by approximately 9-10%) and had the most schools receive F's (by about 4%) of the three districts. The Broward superintendent claims that Miami and West Palm teachers can't be significantly more successful than Broward teachers, yet their school scores suggest otherwise. So Broward teachers are being evaluated more harshly than teachers who are doing better without being so brutally critiqued.

Although there are many factors that go into what makes for a “highly qualified” teacher, as respondent four stated “Very difficult question for a quick survey, there are way too many factors to take into account”, a common theme amongst respondents to the survey was lack of simplicity in teacher evaluations. Teachers, one, six, eight, and nine all suggested that if they could create their own evaluation system, they would aim to create a more simple system than the present one. Respondent nine even stated that she’s in favor of testing, just not to the extent that they have currently prioritized it. The freedom for teachers to educate their students with curricula designed by them and tailored for the students, as opposed to teaching to a test, would be more beneficial than having a formal evaluation of teachers.

Interestingly, while Race to the Top provides states with most of the freedom in determining what makes for a highly qualified teacher and how to best evaluate them, and in Florida this responsibility is passed down to individual counties, as the way that Broward County evaluates its teachers seems to be far harsher and more strict than its neighboring counties of West Palm and Miami-Dade. Yet, the same type of freedom and leeway is inherently stripped from teachers, as they lack the proper agency to determine their own curricula, classroom dynamics, and personal success as a teacher. If national policy could extend freedom and forms of self-determination to teachers, then they would feel more respected professionally and spend more of their time and attention on working with their students and figuring out what is best for them and their learning styles than they would on meeting these regimented requirements in order to be considered qualified or effective.

If counties managed to find freedom within RTTT, then ESSA will likely provide even more power to individual counties as the federal government hands control over education back

to the states. ESSA claims that it will foster local innovation by local educators and leaders that improves student achievement by providing grants to local education agencies. The bill also claims that student performance goals and the ratings of schools will be controlled strictly by the state, instead of the federal government requiring specific forms of state-wide exams that determine the success of students and schools. Lastly, ESSA claims that the state determines how to intervene in unsuccessful schools, as opposed to RTTT that gave the federal government the power to remove administrators of schools that didn't meet AYP for three consecutive years (S.1177, 114th Cong). Therefore, if Broward County had the power to hold its teachers to higher standards through evaluations under RTTT, ESSA will likely include individual considerations at the level of counties.

This movement of power back to the states also make it's more plausible that teacher voices will be heard. It's difficult for the national government to make federal policies about education with such a diverse and large country, and it would be difficult to choose which teacher voices to hear. States officials can more easily and readily listen to the opinions and experiences of teachers within their state. On a similar note, it's also easier for teachers to successfully reach out to state officials and be heard about their concerns than it would be to reach out to federal officials as they would have less red tape to push through to reach state officials than federal officials. It's important that state officials take this power and try to use it to promote local innovation in education as the federal government now aims to do, and that they can provide both districts and teachers with agency. Ideally, this commitment to local innovation will be

Restoring opportunities for kids to invent, communicate, explore, and use a variety of talents to fulfill course requirements [as] We have sacrificed richness, depth, and creativity to a dull struggle for higher and higher scores on on [sic] material that is quickly forgotten when the test is over (Onosko, 8).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The process of surveying proved to be extremely difficult. Teachers have extremely busy schedules, and unfortunately I received fewer responses than I originally hoped that I would attain. Fortunately, the teachers who did respond provided me with very rich material to analyze in depth and provided me with a snapshot of various experiences of high school teachers in Broward County.

As a researcher, it was very important that I created an easily comprehensible and quick survey for teachers that would also provide me with enough material that I would allow for me to analyze the responses and draw connections between them. It was also essential that I respect the voices of the teachers such that I respect their opinions and experiences and don't incorrectly quote them to my own benefit or misconstrue what they say. I also wanted to properly understand their responses and try to understand what might have led them to come to these opinions.

Ideally, this research would have provided me with some sort of epiphany, and the responses would have provided me with some groundbreaking information that I had never come across in the relevant research, or any of my previous research on these topics. With that being said, rarely does research provide some astonishing information that people had never previously talked about, and so it's key to accumulate stories like these to combine with similar opinions from other teachers to build a repertoire of information that will hopefully lead to change in the future to better accommodate teachers needs.

The recent passage of ESSA feels like a limitation. It will hopefully significantly change the landscape of American education to what it was prior to NCLB. However, as the bill was just passed and is currently in the process of being enacted on state levels, it's still unclear exactly

how the bill will play out. It will be interesting to look at the effects of ESSA in the future, and how it changed the realm of education.

It could also be relevant to take a historical look at Broward County and the different ways that teachers have been evaluated and the different expectations that have been placed on them throughout the years in conjunction with changes in federal policies, however this history seems to be difficult to find. Finally, future research should continue to empower teachers and emphasize teacher voice, potentially hand in hand with student voices. It could be a powerful comparison to make of what high school students think makes for a highly qualified versus what the teachers themselves believe to be essential.

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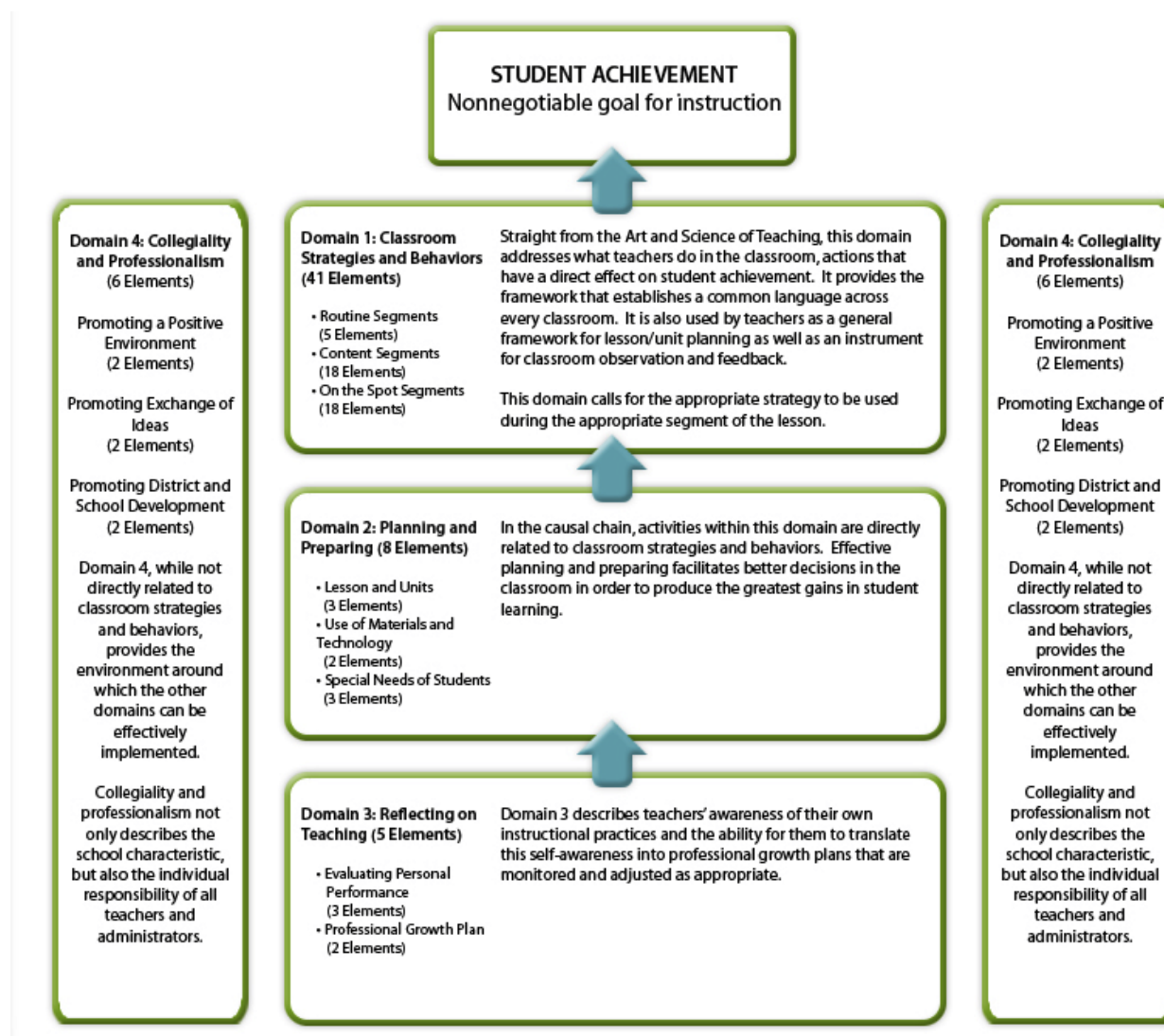
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Appendix:

Appendix 1: Marzano Method of Evaluation (*Marzano*)



Appendix 2: Demographic of the thirteen teachers surveyed

Respondent	Years teaching	What school do you teach at?	What subject do you teach?	Certified Teacher?	Highest Degree Earned
One	9	Charter	English/Reading	Yes	Bachelor's

Two	10	Public	Math	Yes	Graduate
Three	13	Public	Math	Yes	Graduate
Four	3	Public	Science	Yes	Bachelor's
Five	21+	Public	English/Reading	Yes	Graduate
Six	21+	Public	English/Reading	Yes	Graduate
Seven	19	Charter	English/Reading	Yes	Bachelor's
Eight	5	Charter	English/Reading	Yes	Bachelor's
Nine	12	Charter	English/Reading	Yes	Graduate
Ten	9	Public	English/Reading	Yes	Graduate
Eleven	9	Charter	Special Education	Yes	Graduate
Twelve	12	Public	Math	Yes	Graduate
Thirteen	6	Charter	English/Reading	Becoming Certified	Graduate